

# Promoting Literacy in an EFL Online Learning Class through LMS Discussion Forum: A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

The advance of invented technology has influenced the world of education including for higher education. It leases the higher education institutions offer online learning program with the specific way of teaching and learning. This paper is aimed to reveal some challenges faced by the students in an EFL online learning class, to promote literacy activities in the class and to promote how digital literacy supports EFL literacy in this online class. Responses from students of an online learning class in their Learning Management System (LMS) Discussion Forum are used to reveal their challenges in joining the class. Some suggestion of activities to promote language literacy, especially English literacy are provided to give step by step learning.

## CCS Concepts

• Applied computing → Learning management systems

## Keywords

Technology; LMS; EFL; Online Learning; Literacy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, since the invention of technologies, human's lives have been influenced by technologies. Moreover, the invention of computers and the Internet creates new perspectives of lives. This modern technologies allow the students and teachers create new forms of classroom activities and without, it is impossible to solve educational tasks [4]. It can't be denied that information technologies are not only applied in as tools in primary or secondary level of education but also more often used in the higher education system.

Based on the development of institutional process of higher education and to make use of effective modern technologies, some higher educations have started their online learning system of education [7]. This education system is allow the system to create the virtual classes. Although virtual classes have some disadvantages, they have some benefits such as the flexibility and

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the challenge for students to be more autonomous [8]. This way of teaching learning also triggers the way the teachers have to prepare and handle classes' activities, especially for language classes such as the English language teaching (ELT).

Students, both in an online learning and regular class should be language literate but in the different ways of the development since the activities may be different. The different activities to promote literacy may be based on the different background of students such as the age, occupation, educational background etc. In the regular classes in higher education, commonly, a class consists of students with the more or less the same age, and educational background like from high school, while in online learning class, it may vary from 18 to 50 years old. It indicates that they have different experience and background [1]. This different background will create different ways to promoting literacy in online or virtual classroom.

This study focuses to reveal some challenges in developing literacy in an EFL online learning class, to propose how to promote literacy in an online learning class and to propose how digital literacy is used to support EFL literacy in ELT an online class.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Learning Management System

Online learning [5] refers to education system in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet. The term also refers to virtual learning that students do not need to come to campuses or schools and have face to face (F2F) classes [11]. In the online learning, all instructional environments are supported by the Internet and comprises a wide variety of programs that use the Internet within and beyond classroom walls to provide access to instructional materials as well as facilitate interaction among teachers and students [2]. The teaching- learning process in online classes applies a tool connected to the Internet and commonly is called Learning Management system (LMS). This LMS is an e-learning platform of software including a range of services that assist teachers with the management of their courses [9] [10]. LMS provides Discussion Forum that students and a lecturer can discuss the learning material. Usually, a teachers starts the topic to discuss and all students in the class should give responds. In this room, a teacher has the opportunity to explain material in the form of writing accompanied by online resources and students are permitted to ask questions, add more resources or just comment to the explanation.

### 2.2 Literacy in Language Learning

Literacy is becoming more and more popular since every single achievement in life cannot be separated from being literate as in the very simple definition by Kern [6] literacy is the ability to read and

write. In language teaching, literacy refers to “the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices”. Literacy involves language skills which are divided into two parts; the productive skills consist of speaking and writing and the receptive ones which consists of listening and writing. Therefore in designing the classroom activities to promote literacy in learning language, teachers or lecturers in higher education need to consider the ESL programming design as it is suggested by Bergey [3] who claim that classroom-level design should be organized by (1) defining the challenge, (2) understanding best practices, (3) leveraging technology to meet the challenge, and (4) seeing a real-world example. These considerations focus on stating the level of proficiency and setting the methods to achieve it by make use of adaptive technology which can be the resources with more examples to create texts in contexts.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative research which focuses on promoting literacy in reading and writing through online activities through BINUS LMS during the period of learning which consists of 16 sessions in 10 weeks from March to June 2018 in an online learning class. The data is taken from 26 the students responses in Discussion Forum in an English Professional Class of BINUS University Online Learning, at Semester 1 period 2 during March – June 2018. Students’ responses and comments especially in reading and writing skills development are taken as the data to analyze. The analysis is based on the principles of literacy [6] and the ESL programing design [3].

### 4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 The Challenges in Developing Literacy in an Online Learning Class

Students at BINUS Online Learning have to complete one course of English Professional with 4 credits in a period. During this period, students have to be active in Discussion Forum as their activity in this forum will be counted as their attendance. Forum becomes the main access for the students to communicate with the lecturer and classmates. From the 16 sessions of learning, only 10 sessions are applied in Discussion Forum, while the 6 others are used for video conferences. With only 10 sessions to cover all language skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing, it creates some challenges to develop language literacy for the students.

Figure 1 shows the responses of students on the challenges in joining BINUS Online learning. Based on the responses, some challenges are in some areas that first, the limited time in learning many skills and texts. It needs only 10 weeks to be able to grab all material in each skills. From the 26 students, 23 are full-timer workers and have at three courses at the same time. They mention that they have problem in managing their time. While the other 3 are only students who have less problem.

The second challenge is the standard of proficiency they should at least achieve 15 score out of 30 Internet based TOEFL (IBT) in each skills. For different background students, it will be different way how they have to learn. Less than a half of the students in the higher levels of high proficiency but more are in the average or lower level of proficiency. It needs to be considered the way how to promote literacy to them.

The third is the different target of texts to learn. In English professional class, students have to learn English for Academic

Purposes for listening, reading and writing (Essay Writing) while they have to learn English for Business for speaking and writing for specific texts such as business negotiation, business presentation and business documentation. The highest target of achievement in two big areas of language skills are based on the target that they have to achieve at equivalent of minimum 60 score out of 120 score of IBT. The challenge is more on the ideas that some students have no background on the business or working place. Therefore, it needs more effort to learn business texts as well as the academic ones.

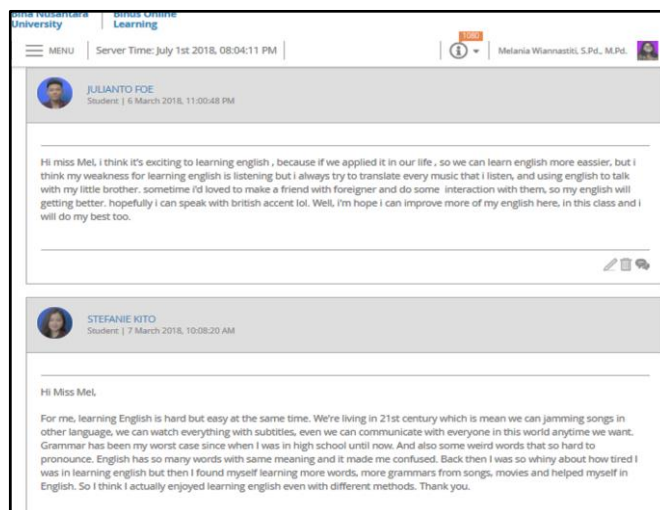


Figure 1. Students’ Responses on Challenge in Joining Online Learning

The last challenge is more on the operational and is categorized as a minimum challenge. For those who live or work in remote areas, sometimes they are lack of the Internet access. Students need more effort in limited time to access the online resources. Although it is the minor challenge, it sometimes becomes major when they miss the video conference due to the lacks of the Internet.

#### 4.2 Promoting Literacy in an Online Learning Class

Online learning classes have their own characteristic in the way of learning. They do not meet one another in the real class, rather in the virtual class. They have different background of education, experiences, location and age, which causes them having different prior knowledge. In term of language proficiency, they have different level of proficiency, as it has been mentioned in the previous sub chapter the second challenge to overcome.

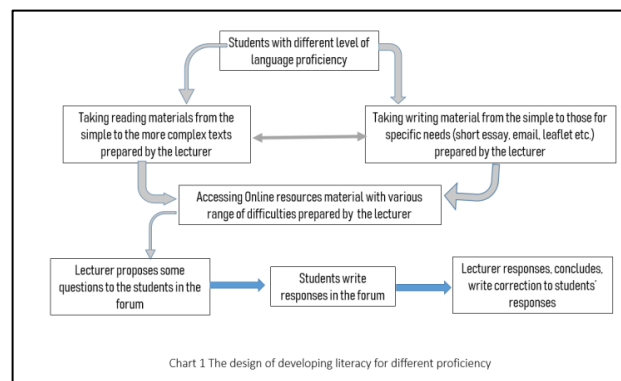


Figure 2. Design of Developing Literacy in an Online Class

To overcome the differences there is the design on how finally the students catch up the differences and get along with the online class progress as it can be seen in figure 2. It shows that students with different language proficiency have to choose the level of reading and writing material based on their level and accessing the online resources prepared by the lecturer. To figure out their level, the lecturer proposes the questions in the forum and the students should respond the questions. Finally, the lecturer will give comments, responses or conclusion

The lecturer should also design the language skill to learn to propose the literacy.

Session	Part	Skill	Material	Proposing activities
1	1	L/S	Video conference	Introducing the class and the target of achievement
2	1	W	Self-Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students read the example of self-introduction done by the lecturer</li> <li>Students to write simple self-introduction</li> <li>Lecturer gives feed back to the students</li> </ul>
	2	W	Self-weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students figure out the weaknesses in learning English and write it in the forum</li> <li>Lecturer notes their weaknesses to design the more specific support based on the weakness</li> </ul>
	3	R	IBT VS PBT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lecturer provides some online resources about IBT vs PBT including reading text and video (YouTube channel) the students should read and watch</li> <li>Students responses in the form and the lecturer give conclusion</li> </ul>

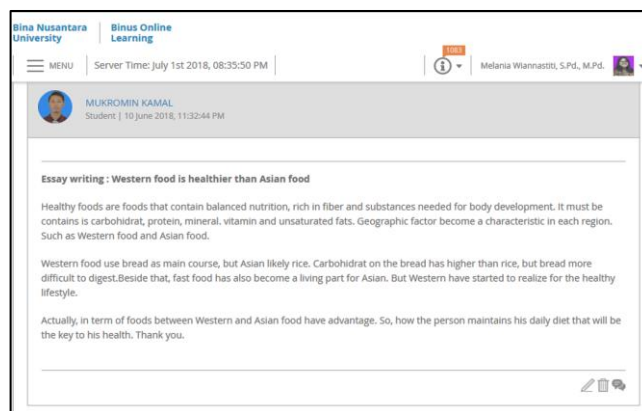
**Figure 3. EFL Teaching Activity Design per Session**

Figure 3 shows the teaching activity design per session that the students should do to develop their literacy. This figure is shown only session 1 and 2 from the 16 sessions the students have to follow.

Focusing on the development of reading literacy, the students need to struggle with their difficulties in reading such as dealing with vocabularies, therefore it is suggested in for students to learn guessing the meaning of words in a reading text to develop their reading skills. The last activities proposed to develop reading skill is to reading from different perspectives. This type of reading activities place the reader in the writer position, that they will understand better the text as it is suggested by Kern (2000) in one of the principle of literacy of language used. In this activity, it is also suggested a literacy principle of collaboration since each student has to create questions from the reading text and other students should answer the question. Moreover, it also suggests the activity of learning grammar.

In the developing writing skills, some activities are proposed. It is needed to considerate that students need to do write in different areas, academic and business. In the academic area, by the end of the course, students should be able to write simple academic essay with the topic of agreement and disagreement texts. For this part, the activities proposed are reading text about how to write a simple essay writing. The students have to practice writing. Lecturer should give feedback on their writing so students can revise them.

On the part of business writing, some activities are proposed especially to learn writing specific genre of writing email and letter. Students are asked to learn how to write effective email and business letter which are different from Indonesian letter and email as their prior knowledge as it is a part of promoting literacy which involves convention. The same as in academic writing, the students have to practice writing and lecturer gives feedback.



**Figure 4. Student's Essay writing**

Figure 4 shows the example of a student's writing as the result of the session activities that a lecturer should give the feedback to the students.

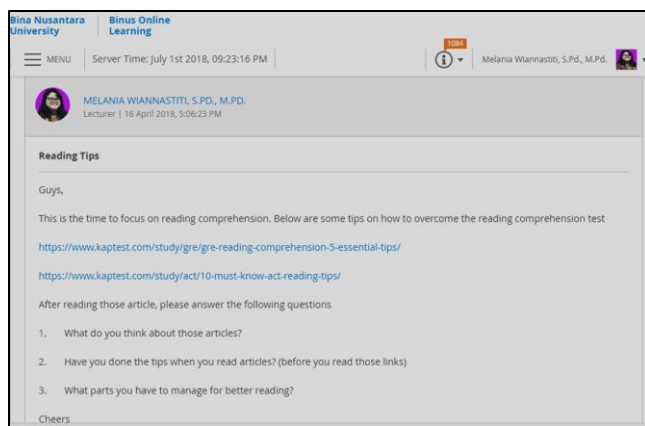
To propose literacy which involves collaboration, convention and language use in writing, the proposed activities are doing group project in writing a leaflet for promotion. Lecturer gives many examples of leaflet and explain the language use. Students have to practice in team. The draft is collected and reviewed by the lecturer and having the review, the team has to revise and make the final project of creating a look like real leaflet.

### 4.3 Online Material to support Literacy Development

In designing the activities to promote English literacy, the third one is leveraging technology to meet the challenge. Since technology is more and more advanced, it is necessary to propose online materials to support the language literacy.

In an online learning class, where students have been familiar with the LMS, they are invited to surf the digital world to access the materials in an open source. Picture 4 shows the lecturer challenge to open the links of some digital sources in the Internet. It shows many links the students have to look at or read to get the idea to support the language development.

As the students have to achieve 15 out of 30 score for each skill, some links are necessary to open and learn such as the <https://www.examenglish.com/> link in which the students can learn how to do the IBT TOEFL and do more practices. Moreover, students are suggested to open the following links for practicing the reading and listening tests (1) <http://demo.toeflibtcourse.com/> and (2) <https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/prepare-your-test/free-practice-tests/writing-practice-teest-1-ielts-academic>.



**Figure 5. Students' Feeling**

They are also invited to use some tools available in the internet to check their works such as

- <https://app.grammarly.com/>
- <http://www.reverso.net/spell-checker/english-spelling-grammar/>

By providing the links, the students can get the idea in developing the language better and to support the discussion forum and the material provided in the LMS.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Online learning class has specific characteristic that it is needed to treat it special in designing the activities that promotes literacy to the students. The design is based on challenges, designs, digital technology and the link to the real world. There are three main challenges in the online learning classes: the different language proficiency, background, location and age. These challenges should be answered by the good design of learning and teaching.

To develop language literacy in online classes, it is needed to support the students with digital literacy so they are able to develop themselves by making use of thousands resources. Lecturer should provide the way the students should do to access the free material effectively.

Since this research is still a case, it is challenging to do research study on the development of EFL literacy using LMS for more classes and more

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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